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Letter dated 16 October 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With regard to your note transmitting the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of religious intolerance, dated 24 August 1998 (A/53/279), and in particular to its paragraph 51, which refers to the alleged related cases of two Greek citizens and presents an incorrect description of the situation in Greece, I would like to bring the following to your attention:

1. The case of E. Androutsopoulou, who was reportedly arrested for having made several references to Buddhism while teaching German at a private school, was brought before the three-member Court of First Instance of Rodopi, which acquitted her of all charges following its ruling under No. 878/18.6.98.

2. As regards the case of the pastor in the Greek Evangelical Church of Thessaloniki who was said to have also been arrested for failure to possess an official house of prayer licence, both the Police Department and the Office of the Attorney General of Thessaloniki have confirmed that no charges whatsoever were filed against the Reverend George Goudas and that no legal action has been undertaken against him.

3. Greece is party to all regional and international human rights instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the international covenants on human rights and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Consequently, there should be no reasonable doubt that it attaches the utmost importance to all related issues, including those concerning the elimination of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, and that it strives to guarantee its citizens the enjoyment of the highest internationally recognized standards of human rights.

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4. Furthermore, Greece is fully committed to constructive cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur, as stressed by the latter in paragraph 29 of his report. In the same spirit, the Greek Government sincerely hopes that Mr. Amor will, on the basis of the above irrefutable facts, take all the necessary steps, in his contacts with the competent United Nations bodies and in the course of implementing his mandate in the future, dispel any misleading conclusions as regards the policies followed by Greece in this respect that may have been drawn from the reading of the said report.

5. Finally, it should be noted, for the sake of good order, that His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is the spiritual leader of all people of Christian Orthodox faith and not of the "Greek Catholic Church", as seems to be erroneously implied in paragraph 71 of the report.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 110 (b).

(*Signed*) Christos **Zacharakis**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative